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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S INTRODUCTORY CALL ON MINISTER OF INTERNAL AFFAIRS RAMIL USUBOV

Classified By: AMBASSADOR ANNE E. DERSE PER 1.4(B,D)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: In her introductory call on Minister of Internal Affairs Ramil Usubov, the Ambassador discussed Azerbaijan's cooperation with the U.S. in law enforcement and the effort against trafficking in persons. She emphasized the need for the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) to adhere to international standards for ethics and human rights, and to follow rule of law, urging the Ministry to establish an internal investigative unit similar to an Office of the Inspector General. Underscoring that overturning the "totalitarian" legacy of Soviet rule remains a challenge, Usubov admitted that the MIA still has areas in which progress is needed, such as training its personnel to act within the law and continuing to work to combat terrorism, trafficking in persons, narcotics trafficking, and illegal immigration. He also said that the Ministry has taken steps to ensure that police officers adhere to international standards for ethics and human rights, but that some individuals out of thousands of officers do not comply. Rumors continue to circulate that Usubov will soon be fired, possibly in connection with the verdict in the ongoing trial of the Haji Mammadov kidnapping ring. END SUMMARY

¶2. (C) During her July 18 introductory call on Minister of Internal Affairs Ramil Usubov, the Ambassador reviewed U.S. priorities for the bilateral relationship: cooperation in the Global War on Terror and regional and global security and stability, global energy security, and advancing democracy through political and economic reform. She highlighted the important role played by the Ministry of Internal Affairs in providing vital protection for the Embassy. She thanked the MIA for its strong cooperation in law enforcement and anti-trafficking in persons efforts, and encouraged the Minister to build on the momentum from President Aliyev's successful visit to Washington in pushing the relationship between the U.S. and Azerbaijan to a higher level.

¶3. (C) Usubov explained the difficulty Azerbaijan had immediately after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and said that in Azerbaijan's first years of independence, the GOAJ proved itself to be incapable of taking control. He said that it took two years of strenuous effort by former President Heydar Aliyev to take control of the situation, and that after these efforts, Azerbaijan became one of the safest countries in the former Soviet Union. Usubov explained that adopting new laws was easy, but that implementation remained a problem because thirty to forty percent of MIA personnel are disciples of the previous regime. He said that overturning the legacy of the "totalitarian regime," especially people's mentality remains a major challenge to this day, and that the MIA is making slow but steady progress.

¶4. (C) The Minister admitted that the MIA has areas in which progress is still needed. He mentioned specifically that the

MIA still needs to train its personnel to act within the law, and to continue working to combat terrorism, trafficking in persons, narcotics trafficking, and illegal immigration. Usubov said that information-sharing is vital, and thanked the USG for its support in these measures. With strong efforts like those from the MIA, Usubo continued, Azerbaijan has the potential to become a great model for the region.

¶ 15. (C) The Ambassador raised the issue of human rights, explaining the importance of meeting international standards for ethics and rule of law. She said that she would like to see an Office of the Inspector General or similar investigative body created within the MIA, and offered to assist. Usubov said that the opposition's claims of police brutality are not entirely true, and that the MIA has taken steps to hold the responsible officers liable for their offenses. He said that in 2005, a total of 383 police officers were punished. Out of these, 27 were criminally charged, 50 were dismissed from the MIA, 32 were demoted (including 5 high-ranking officers), and 274 were punished by other means, such as with fines or warnings. He stated that the MIA is taking the necessary proactive approach, but acknowledged that out of thousands of police officers, some do not comply with international standards for ethics and rule of law. The Minister thanked the Ambassador for her offer of assistance, and agreed to notify the Embassy if assistance was needed.

¶ 16. (C) COMMENT: The day after the Ambassador's call on Usubov, the press carried reports that Usubov had taken away responsibility for supervision of the Ministry's Interrogations Unit from Deputy Minister Eyvazov. (Eyvazov, former head of the Ministry's Organized Crime Unit, is believed to have been responsible for some of that unit's

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more egregious human rights violations in the wake of the October 2003 presidential elections.) A power struggle clearly continues in the Ministry, and rumors continue to circulate that Usubov - who stayed at the helm of the Ministry in spite of the arrest of an MIA-run kidnapping ring -- will soon be fired. The trial of those involved in the Haji Mammadov kidnapping ring is in process; we continue to monitor events at MIA closely.

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